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ABSTRACT

The number of academic consortia, cooperating groups of institutions, have exploded in recent years in response to several societal and internal forces. While others have examined aspects of consortia, this paper reports the first intensive effort dealing with effectiveness. The study is divided into 2 parts: (1) What constitutes consortium effectiveness? and (2) In what ways are the Great Lakes Colleges Association and the Associated Colleges of the Midwest perceived effective? Part I found that consortia exist for their member institutions and are effective if they meet the needs of their members. It also disclosed a 5 category framework of institutional needs that consortia should meet, the 5 E's expanded student and faculty opportunities, promotion of greater managerial efficiency, promotion of experimentation and change, promotion of exchange through interpersonal contacts among the members, and entrepreneurship. The study found both associations perceived as effective in providing programs in the need areas of the members. It also found both the unusual preliminary survey mechanism and the 5 category framework to be useful research tools. (Author/HS)

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THE FIVE E'S OF CONSORTIUM EFFECTIVENESS

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at the
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ABSTRACT

Academic consortium effectiveness is the topic of this paper. The number of academic consortia, cooperating groups of institutions, have "exploded" in recent years in response to several societal and internal forces. While others have examined aspects of consortia, this paper reports the first intensive effort dealing with effectiveness. The study is divided into two parts: (1) "What constitutes consortium effectiveness?" and (2) "In what ways are the Great Lakes Colleges Association (GLCA) and the Associated Colleges of the Midwest (ACM) perceived effective?"

Part I found that consortia exist for their member institutions and are effective if they meet the needs of the members. It also disclosed a five category framework of institutional "needs" which consortia should meet, the five E's: expanded student and faculty opportunities, promotion of greater managerial efficiency, promotion of experimentation and change, promotion of exchange through interpersonal contacts among the members, and entrepreneurship. Part II used this framework for an examination of perceived effectiveness of two consortia.

The study found both associations perceived as effective in providing programs in the "need" areas of the members. It also found both the unusual preliminary survey mechanism and the five category framework to be useful research tools.

The Five E's of Consortium Effectiveness

Distinct, unique, diverse, autonomous: until recently, these were the terms of the chroniclers of American Higher Education. As James A. Perkins noted in 1967:

> The idea of university autonomy--of the sanctity of academic pursuits--is as old as the idea of the university itself... It has been the conceptual guardian of academic freedom, the moat around the city of intellect whose drawbridge will lower only in response to internal signals.[1]

Apparently, the "internal signals" have been given. The explosive growth of voluntary academic consortia in the past few years and indeed, the attendance today seems to indicate the truth in Eldon Johnson's 1967 observation: "We have entered a reverse historical phase which seems to embrace interinstitutional coordination and cooperation as a necessary step for completeness..."[2]

All of us are aware of the explosive growth of academic consortia in the past few years. According to Lewis Patterson, the ranks have grown from nineteen to sixty-one in the five years since 1965.[3] Many have tried to explain this massive cooperative trend. Others have studied the formation and development of formal interinstitutional arrangements: Edgar Sagan, Fritz Grupe, and Richard Lancaster who also hypothesized and tested a model of interdependence and conflict.[4] All of these studies help clarify the voluntary academic consortium and are important. However, until my dissertation, no one had intensively examined concepts of consortium effectiveness despite the many calls for such a study.

Two years ago at my first meeting of consortium directors, Edgar Sagan, the featured speaker that day, had hardly finished his remarks when he was mildly reproached from the floor for studying the development of consortia when the "real need" was for a study of effectiveness. Again, last spring, at the annual meetings of The Association of American Colleges, a consortium director (who shall go unnamed) arose, and with some emotion, stated: "We must find ways to show how we are effective. We must!" Imagine my pleasure for, at that time, I was deeply into a dissertation which examined two questions:

1. What constitutes consortium effectiveness?
2. In what ways are the Great Lakes Colleges Association (GLCA) and the Associated Colleges of the Midwest (ACM) perceived to be effective?

Part I - What Constitutes Consortium Effectiveness?

The first part of the thesis was a preliminary survey conducted during summer, 1970. The survey consisted of twelve interviews and thirty-one mailed questionnaire letters to persons across the country associated, in some way, with academic consortia. (Several persons in the room today kindly responded to this survey.) All answered only one question: "What constitutes consortium effectiveness?"

The mailed survey suggested that the respondents dictate their thoughts on the subject into a voice recorder. Several persons commented on the attractiveness of this type of survey for it required little time. The interviews were also largely one-questioned although there was a certain amount of banter.

Analysis of the responses to the preliminary survey consisted of identifying key words and phrases in the letters and recordings of the interviews. Eventually, in this eye-check method of factor analysis, patterns appeared. The major pattern found in analyzing the preliminary survey is that a consortium exists for its member institutions and is not autonomous. Thus, an effective consortium is one that is perceived to meet the particular needs of its member institutions. The survey disclosed five general categories of institutional "needs" which consortia are, to a greater or lesser extent, expected to meet. These "needs" are the Five E's:

1. Expanded Student and Faculty Opportunities
2. Promotion of Greater Managerial Efficiency
3. Promotion of Experimentation and Change
4. Promotion of Exchange through Interpersonal Contacts among the Members, and
5. Entrepreneurship.

These categories are not mutually exclusive. Certain consortium activities help meet several needs. For example, some people might view a given off-campus program as an expanded student opportunity where others might view the same program as experimental and causing on-campus change.

1. Need for Expanded Student and Faculty Opportunities

Students and faculty today have specialized and wide-ranging interests, and it is difficult for an individual institution to accomodate all of these interests. Similarly, students and faculty today are mobile and no longer view the campus classroom situation as the only locale for learning. Thus, several respondents noted that liberal arts colleges especially, have a need for a mechanism to help expand student and faculty opportunities. A consortium is often expected to be this mechanism.

The respondents to the preliminary survey noted two aspects of the need for expanded student opportunities:

1. need for increased student academic options, and
2. need for opportunities which help bring about personal maturity.

The first of these aspects reflects the view that few, if any, colleges can individually have expertise in enough areas to satisfy the demands of an increasingly sophisticated student body. Those who cited this aspect feel that there is value simply in providing a large number of possibilities. The second aspect, need for opportunities which bring about greater personal growth in students, reflects the view held by many persons that when a student breaks his normal campus routines, he often gains substantial personal maturity. This is often called "experiential learning" and is almost always associated with off-campus student programs.

The respondents to the preliminary survey also noted a number of aspects of the needs for expanded faculty opportunities among colleges. These needs condense into six categories:

1. opportunities for beginning faculty,
2. strictly disciplinary opportunities,
3. inter-cultural opportunities,
4. pedagogical opportunities,
5. independent project opportunities,
6. opportunities designed for administrators.

The first aspect of the need for expanded faculty opportunities reflects the importance of giving young faculty special chances to develop teaching skills. According to the respondents, in most research-oriented graduate institutions such opportunities are minimal even for teaching assistants.

The aspect of strictly disciplinary opportunities reflects the view of some respondents that faculty can go "stale" after a few years and can profit from new educational experiences in their area of specialization. The decision to give a faculty member tenure is approximately a $500,000 decision. Colleges need to protect this investment and a consortium can often be the mechanism to help.

The third aspect of the need for expanded faculty opportunities reflects the importance assigned by the respondents to obtaining a broader perspective of one's own culture through close examination of other cultures. It also reflects the fact that faculty like to travel. Few colleges can alone provide adequate inter-cultural opportunities for faculty.

The fourth aspect of the need for expanded faculty opportunities reflects the importance that many people assign to the continued search for better teaching methods. Liberal arts colleges take pride in their teaching and feel that they must ensure continued high quality.

The fifth aspect of the need was described as "letting a faculty member do his own thing" by one respondent who further noted that, in certain ways, all professors are "unique specialists". In small institutions where most dollars go into the instructional budget, monies for "off-beat" projects are most appreciated by faculty.

Finally, administrative development is important too. When an administrator improves, theoretically so does his institution. In this time of "management revolution", up-to-date administrators are essential.

2. Need for Promotion of Greater Managerial Efficiency

"Efficiency is the ratio between two variables: cost and output."[5] North Burn, borrowing a bit from McGeorge Bundy, stated the need for greater managerial efficiency in a different way noting that consortia can often help institutions to "get a bigger bang out of their educational buck."[6]

The early 1970's seem a time of fiscal crises in higher education. Virtually every major national educational convention in 1970/71 dealt with some aspect of this subject. Institutions now, more than ever, understand their need for greater managerial efficiency and look for help from many quarters, including consortia.

3. Need for Experimentation and Change

Dean Bardwell Smith of Carleton College commented in a preliminary survey interview, on the need, particularly for liberal arts colleges to "remain in the vanguard of educational thought and techniques."[7] In order to do this, colleges must find ways to innovate and change. Other respondents also noted the importance of this area observing the current discontent with higher education which is found within and outside the academic community. Our ways of education are now under attack in many quarters as not suited to the ever-changing environment of the twentieth century. For the liberal arts college, the problem is further compounded. In an era of specialization, many respondents noted that few colleges can rival the large universities in quality or variety of faculty. By innovating and changing, however, colleges can provide unique opportunities which attract the many students and faculty who seek something different from the ways of the university. A consortia can help meet this need by serving as an "escape valve" mechanism for innovative faculty and by sponsoring programs which stimulate on-campus changes.

4. Need for Promotion of Exchange through Interpersonal Contacts

The area most often mentioned by respondents to the preliminary survey is the need for exchange through interpersonal contacts with persons from other institutions. A letter from the chairman of the Great Lakes Colleges Association Faculty Council highlighted this need:

> Simply talking at relative leisure, for two or three days with someone from a place where the routines are different is most refreshing. It also provides sometimes the energy to make a drastic change, because you feel it can't be too bad if it works at X. So much depends on what football coaches call mental attitude: which really means psychic lift and self-confidence. The average teacher is probably an inefficient, long-working slave-type. He worries about being an automaton, but he worries more about getting too far behind... His real recreation probably comes from busman's holidays, talking shop without having to get work done...[8]

Consortia can serve as a mechanism to facilitate such gatherings.

An essential aspect of this "need" is the importance assigned by the respondents to the development of a wide-spread "sense of the large community." This "sense" is called "GLCA-ness" by President Henry Acres and is defined as an "intuitive reponse to any educational problem: can this be more efficaciously dealt with by the consortium?"[9] When many persons have this "sense," certain positive things happen. For example, what one respondent called "swift currency" takes place. This term describes new ideas moving quickly among the members of a consortium and being implemented on several campuses.[10] Another example of a positive result of the wide-spread "sense of the large community" is that various specialists get to know each other and "do not feel quite so lonely." A third example of a positive result of the existence of the sense of a larger community is "leveling up." This term describes a "keeping up with the Jones" syndrome in which consortium members strive to "keep up" with their colleague institutions in the inter-institutional "peer group." In this peer group, information exchange takes place and this often leads to a situation where all institutions learn from each other and improve their programs to become more nearly "equal." This is "leveling up."[11]

5. Entrepreneurship

One need area which many respondents perceived to be increasingly important is the fifth E, entrepreneurship. This term describes the need for an external agent which represents the institutions to the outside world. There are three aspects to this need: need for grantsmanship, need for establishment of external cooperative ties, and need for articulation.

Grantsmanship is well understood but effectively practiced by only a few. The need for establishment of external cooperative arrangements reflects the view that colleges can no longer provide all of the services necessary. Consortia often are expected to set up ties with such organizations as computing centers, research laboratories, and multiversities. Often such arrangements are impossible for single colleges to establish, at least in the initial process.

The third need mentioned under the category of entrepreneurship in the preliminary survey is for articulation to the larger environment. Eldon Johnson identified this need in 1962 when he spoke about the "society increasingly deaf to small voices."[12] Colleges want their "story" told but, again, find that they cannot alone have enough impact upon such groups as legislatures, government agencies, and foundations. Impact is thus the key word in understanding the need for entrepreneurship.

There is no way to validate this framework in the scarce inter-organizational literature but, for the connoisseur some interesting parallels can be drawn with the structural-functional sub-systems described by Katz and Kahn in their 1966 book: The Social Psychology of Organizations.[13] These researchers define five sub-systems of organization: production, maintenance, boundary, adaptive and managerial. Each of these sub-systems represents functional outcomes which any organization or social system needs to resolve. While the five category institutional need framework does not perfectly match the Katz and Kahn scheme, there is overlap. Thus, the preliminary survey seems to have, at least, some substantiation in organizational literature.

Part II - In What Ways are the Great Lakes Colleges Association (GLCA) and the Associated Colleges of the Midwest (ACM) Perceived to be Effective?

A modified case-study method with the preliminary survey schema as a guide served well in examining the perceived effectiveness of GLCA and ACM. Thirty-five interviews in GLCA and thirty-four in ACM provided the major means of obtaining data. These two interview groups consisted of presidents, chief academic officers, chief fiscal officers, and many other knowledgeable persons.

A second method of obtaining data was a questionnaire which examined specific questions:

1. Is there consensus among the member institutions about the needs to be met by a consortium? Is there consensus among the various officers of a particular institution about the need to be met by a consortium?

2. Is there consensus among the member institutions about the needs actually met by a given consortium program? Is there consensus among the various officers of a particular insitution about the needs actually met by a given consortium program?

The answers to these questions are "yes" and "no". "Yes", questionnaire analysis found differences among the institutions in their views of "needs" to be met and actually met by given programs. "No", questionnaire analysis did not find differences among the various officers of particular institutions; not even between faculty and administration.

The third method of obtaining information about the two consortia was through their publications. These, of course, include such things as annual reports, program brochures, etc.

Figure I shows the importance of each "need" as assigned by the questionnaire respondents in the two consortia. Note that a score of 3.0 by the respondent to a "need" area is a rating of "important". Thus, all five of the need areas are "important" to both associations. Please also note that expanded opportunities is the highest rated "need" in each consortium. Thirdly, note that questionnaire analysis found an apparent difference between the two as associations on the needs for innovation and change and promotion of exchange through interpersonal contacts.

These differences in perceived "needs" to be met are most important in assessing effectiveness. My mother often said to me: "From whom much is expected, much is required." I remember those words well for they always preceded a spanking. The saying holds for consortia. The high rating given to the need category of expansion of student and faculty opportunities for GLCA represents high membership expectation. If GLCA does not produce in this area, it can expect a sore bottom.

Before looking at the perceived effectiveness of GLCA and ACM on the five E's, a few words of introduction. Both GLCA and ACM are composed of twelve fairly good liberal arts colleges. While the two associations are similar in many ways, there is one fairly distinct difference. GLCA operates in a decentralized manner. The manifestations of this are a small central office consisting of only two professionals, the "agent college" concept by which the association employs individual schools to administer specific programs, and the use of otherwise full-time professors as program coordinators. ACM, on the other hand, is a more centralized operation. It has a central office three times that of GLCA out of which almost all programs are administered.

An indication of the commitment of both Associations to their own style is found in the comparison of perceived "need" of exchange through interpersonal contacts. The "need" is perceived to be much greater in decentralized GLCA.

Perceived Effectiveness of GLCA and ACM

GLCA has correctly been labelled an academic program oriented consortium as shown in its early publications which generally gave as the Association raison d'être: to do those academic things better done collectively than singly. In line with this, GLCA currently sponsors eight full scale off-campus student programs although the association places greater emphasis on its many faculty development activities. Examples include the Programmed Instruction Project which involved more than a hundred faculty in actual programming, the Non-West Program through which seventy-five faculty members from all twelve campuses received grants, the Arts and Humanities Program in which eight-one individuals received dollars to carry out projects

FIGURE I MEAN SCORES OF INSTITUTIONAL "NEEDS" BY ASSOCIATION: GLCA AND ACM

Mean Importance by Association

Institutional "Need"	GLCA	ACM
Expanded Opportunities	4.1	4.3
Managerial Efficiency	3.1	3.3
Innovation and Change	3.5	2.9
Interpersonal Contacts	3.5	3.1
Entrepreneurship	3.4	3.6

(many of an unusual nature), and the on-going Yugoslav Program in which fifteen to twenty faculty carry on both independent and cooperative research projects in that nation each summer.

ACM, as a multi-purpose consortium, is also involved in expanding opportunities, particularly for students. For example, in fall, 1970, ACM sponsored thirteen off-campus student programs with nine others in the planning stages. However, it has not been nearly so active as GLCA in expanding faculty opportunities.

In the category of promotion of greater managerial efficiency, GLCA efforts before 1970 are nearly non-existent. As one chief fiscal officer stated: "In what ways has GLCA promoted greater managerial cooperation? Absolutely none." However, it is only recently that a strong demand for efficiency oriented programs has emerged in that Association. Because GLCA is now seriously looking at the area, few respondents were sharply critical.

ACM's multi-purposeness led it into the managerial area several years ago. Early efforts included cooperative insurance and the selection of an agent for joint collection of NDEA loans, but these are small things compared to current projects. Perhaps the nation's most ambitious cooperative venture is the ACM Periodical Bank to which each participating member institution has contributed sizable monies; monies obtained through the sale of campus periodical holdings. With these funds, the centralized operation buys and maintains over two thousand periodicals and journals. While some respondents noted fears that the colleges may have "gone in blind," most respondents seem to feel that, after the birth pains of a long labour, the Periodical Bank will prove a far-sighted and profitable venture.

Another efficiency oriented program (which also relates to the entrepreneurship category) is the Single Application Method (SAM). SAM allows students interested in two or more ACM colleges the luxury of filling out only one application and paying a single fee. The student is then considered by those colleges in his preferred order. A chief fiscal officer summarized for many, sounding a bit like a carnival barker: "SAM is terrific! Everyone wins on it..."

While promotion of efficiency seems more important to ACM than to GLCA (at least over the long haul), the reverse is true in the category of promotion of experimentation and change. The importance of the area was repeatedly cited in that Association. For example, a president stated:

> ...The small college is not going to be able to keep up with the knowledge explosion and be able to service the clientele that it has serviced in the past because students now are too curious, too self-actualizing, too mobile. No single college in the year 2000 can have a sufficient complex intellectual strength to attract that part of the population which is the most sophisticated and most demanding. In order to survive, we must find other means of being attractive.

Most of the GLCA programs, particularly in the faculty development area, attempt to bring about changes on the campus. These programs are perceived as successful in satisfying this goal but the problem according to several respondents, is that the change is "pocketed." Changes do not pervasively transform the central core of any college's curriculum. A chief academic officer noted this:

> If we look at GLCA, its greatest activities are basically unrelated to the on-going processes of the campus. In every case, we are talking about something off-campus or some mechanism on-campus that meets in a motel, and that is exactly how most campuses want it no matter what people say.

This is the peripheral nature of consortium programs so often cited in the literature. However, as a president commented (in a most presidential way): "...the iceberg of educational change is melted only by candles." According to my respondents, through its many programs which bring about "pocket" innovation, GLCA is certainly effective in "lighting some candles."

The category exchange through interpersonal contacts is the category that nobody dislikes. While rated highly by few, importance of this area is rated lowly by almost no one, especially in decentralized GLCA. In both associations, examples of the "sense of the larger community" abound. Let me cite just one. A GLCA President observed that:

> ...the presidency is a lonely job. This is primarily the reason why three of us got together last summer. We have similar problems and can discuss them openly together. We became friends at GLCA meetings. For that matter, I have no hesitation about picking up a phone and calling any member of the Board to discuss a problem.

Entrepreneurship and especially articulation is viewed as increasingly important by many in both Associations. Certain recent GLCA activities such as testimony on the "Miller Bill," "The Tax Reform Act of 1969," and the NSF Budget for 1971 indicate that GLCA is no longer only an academic program oriented Association. It is transforming into multi-purposeness. On the other hand, ACM needs no transition for it has long been a national leader among consortia in entrepreneurship. Who else among us has landed $5,306,095 worth of grant monies? How many of us maintain a Washington, D.C. office to interpret our colleges to government foundations? Who else has a Single Application Method which makes its colleges known to secondary school counsellors throughout the nation? Impact is the key work in entrepreneurship and, almost to a man, the respondents to my interviews feel that ACM is making a tremendous external impact for its members.

Overall, the problem in assessing effectiveness is that consortia are too often viewed as panaceas. Effectiveness is in the eyes of the beholder and there are many and diverse beholders. To an open-ended question about priorities, respondents' suggestions were legion and often contradictory. Some want efficiency only, some want academic programs only, etc. Because of this paradox, a sharp delineation of priorities, something seldom done

in inter-institutional organization, is essential. Without a delineation, it is all too easy for the cooperative mechanism to respond only to the loudest voice.

In conclusion: academic consortia represent an attempt by their member institutions to cope with certain societal forces. An effective consortium is one that meets the needs of its member institutions. The five E's - (expanded student and faculty opportunities, promotion of greater managerial efficiency, promotion of experimentation and change, promotion of exchange through interpersonal contacts among the members, and entrepreneurship) - proved a helpful schema for an organized examination of perceived effectiveness in GLCA and ACM. The framework admirably identified the changing perceived "needs" and perceived effectiveness of the Associations in meeting those "needs."

Footnotes

[1]James A. Perkins, "The New Conditions of University Autonomy," in Emerging Patterns in American Higher Education, ed. by Logan Wilson (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1967), p.8.

[2]Eldon Johnson, "Consortia in Higher Education," Educational Record, 48 (Fall, 1967), p. 341.

[3]Lewis D. Patterson, Consortia in American Higher Education: ERIC Research Report No. 7, (Washington, D.C.: The George Washington University, 1970), p. 2.

[4]Edgar Sagan, "An Analysis of the Processes of Developing a Consortium," Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Ohio State University, 1969; Fritz H. Grupe, "The Establishment of Collegiate Centers," Unpublished doctoral dissertation, State University of New York at Albany, 1969; Richard B. Lancaster, "Interdependence and Conflict in a Consortium for Cooperation in Higher Education: Toward a Theory of Interorganizational Behavior," Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan, 1969.

[5]Howard R. Bowen and Gorden K. Douglas, "Cutting Instructional Costs," Proceedings of the Annual Meetings of the Association of American Colleges, Cincinnati, Ohio, January, 1971.

[6]North Burn, Executive Director of the Five Colleges, Inc., private interview, Amherst, Mass., June 30, 1970.

[7]Bardwell Smith, Dean of Carleton College, private interview, Chicago, Illinois, June 4, 1970.

[8]Letter from Walter Fertig, Wabash College, June 29, 1970.

[9]Henry A. Acres, President, Great Lakes Colleges Association, private interview, Ann Arbor, Michigan, March 27, 1971.

[10]Charles Teske, Dean of Arts and Sciences, The Evergreen State University, private interview, Oberlin, Ohio, May 17, 1970.

[11]This term was first used in the preliminary survey by Charles Teske in the above cited interview and was later used by President Weimer Hicks of Kalamazoo College in an interview on May 27, 1970.

[12]Eldon Johnson, "Cooperation in Higher Education," Liberal Education, 48 (December, 1962), p.476.

[13]Daniel Katz and Robert Kahn, The Social Psychology of Organizations, New York:(John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1966), pp. 84-109.